

Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)

There are 97 soil and water conservation districts making a difference in your community. No matter how big or small, each of the 102 counties is represented equally. From educating homeowners on practical utilization of water to helping rural landowners save soil and improve water quality; it takes everyone working together to protect our soil and water! Without these vital resources our communities cannot thrive!



During the 2012 spring session, the Illinois General Assembly will have the opportunity to address a number of issues that have had devastating effects on many downstate conservation programs.

Proposed legislation such as HB4700 and SB3616 will help fund SWCDs. HB5366 will get more conservation on the land. SB3543 will provide a stable funding source for SWCDs. And, the gaming bill will provide stable funding for the SWCDs. We respectfully request that members of the House and Senate give careful and positive consideration to supporting these measures.



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HB5366 Necessary to Encourage Conservation Practice Application

SB0223, passed by the 96th General Assembly in 2009, became effective January 1, 2010. The intent of the bill was to clarify the definition of "public works" in the Illinois Prevailing Wage Act. The act amended the definition of "public works" to include "grants" as one of the state funding sources that would classify a construction project as a "public work." That simple change has created some serious problems for landowners, soil and water conservation districts and contractors using state cost share dollars for soil and water conservation practices.

State cost share program dollars are allocated to soil and water conservation districts to be used as incentive payments to encourage the application of soil conservation and water quality protection practices.

With the requirement to now meet Prevailing Wage Act mandates, contractors must provide a certified payroll to prove that they have paid their employees the appropriate prevailing wage. When a contractor is an owner/operator and has no employees or when a landowner does some of the work of installing the conservation practice, it becomes very difficult to provide a certified payroll showing that the person doing the work is paying himself or herself prevailing wages. This is particularly true in the case of a landowner who may choose to use his/her farm tractor and seed drill to seed a waterway, buffer or filter strip to help cover part of the cost. How does the landowner pay himself or herself prevailing wage and provide proof with the certified payroll when they are not getting paid at all?

There are other circumstances that are equally as onerous such as a farmer who is a first time no-tiller. Incentive payments are provided to farmers who will try no-till on a small acreage to learn how to properly manage the practice. How does the farmer show that prevailing wages were paid when the incentive is given to do nothing?

Though this may sound ridiculous, the Illinois Department of Labor is charged with enforcing the Prevailing Wage Act and has stated that "if one dollar of public funds is used on a conservation practice then prevailing wages must be paid and a certified payroll must be filed with the SWCD - the provider of the public funds."

HB 5366, filed by Representative David Reis, will address this onerous requirement by amending the definition of "public works" to exclude "conservation projects or practices on private land paid for wholly or in part out of public funds."

It is very important that this bill become law. A growing number of contractors and landowners will no longer apply conservation practices that are subject to the requirements of the Prevailing Wage Act. Considering the huge efforts that are currently taking place to curtail nitrogen, phosphorous and other nutrients from entering the State's waters, we can not afford to pass up any opportunity to apply a conservation practice that will help achieve that end.

We hope you will support this important and necessary piece of legislation to get it out of the House Labor Committee and allow it to be brought to the floor where it can be passed.



Soil and Water Conservation Districts Assist Others to Protect, Maintain, Enhance and Improve their Environmental Resources

- The 97 SWCDs are continually involved in assisting local interests to maximize use of available resources while also protecting these essential environmental resources.
- SWCDs constantly monitor conservation practices that have been installed to assure they are functioning properly and to offer assistance to landowners if there are problems.
- Through application of inexpensive conservation techniques, SWCDs have saved tax payers countless millions of dollars to maintain the soil and water resources on which they depend



NOTE: SWCDs DO NOT have taxing authority and must rely on state source funding to employ staff to administer programs.

Gaming expansion being considered by the 97th General Assembly has the potential to create thousands of jobs and fund SWCDs at a sustainable level.

PROTECT & CONSERVE



Districts' Spotlight

Will - South Cook

The Will-S. Cook SWCD has a web site that provides information for their customers regarding the services that are available from the SWCD. Those services are summarized below.

Grassed Waterways are strips of grass seeded in areas of cropland where water concentrates or flows off a field. Benefits of grassed waterways are the shaping of a natural drainage way and establishment of grass to prevent gully erosion and the formation of gullies in fields. The natural channel carries water runoff from the field while the grass prevents the water from forming a gully. Vegetation amongst the waterway may also trap sediment washed from cropland, absorb some chemicals and nutrients in the runoff water and provide cover for small birds and animals. Grass waterways are easier to cross with farm machinery than are natural gullies.



Photo Courtesy USDA-NRCS



A Water and Sediment Control Basin is an earth embankment or a combination ridge and channel constructed across the slope of minor watercourses to form a sediment trap and water detention basin with a stable outlet. This practice is applied to reduce watercourse and gully erosion, trap sediment, and reduce and manage onsite and downstream runoff.

Filter Strips are strips or areas of herbaceous vegetation that remove contaminants from overland flow. Filter strips reduce suspended solids and associated contaminants in runoff, reduce dissolved contaminants loadings in runoff, and reduce suspended solids and associated contaminants in irrigation tailwater.



Photo Courtesy USDA-NRCS



A Terrace is an earth embankment or a combination ridge and channel constructed across the field slope that intercepts, detains, and safely conveys runoff to an outlet. Terraces are used to reduce sheet-and-rill erosion and prevent gully development. Terracing reduces sediment pollution to lakes and streams, and traps phosphorus attached to sediment particles. Terraces may also retain runoff for moisture conservation.

Photo Courtesy USDA-NRCS

Improperly abandoned wells may be a direct conduit for pollutants to enter aquifers and contaminate groundwater shared by all citizens. The Well Decommissioning Practice (WDP) provides technical and financial assistance to owners of improperly abandoned wells who wish to seal those wells to protect groundwater from potential contamination.



Photo Courtesy Cass SWCD, ND

As of October 1st 2007, Illinois landowners with 5 or more contiguous acres of unimproved land may apply for a reduction in their property tax valuation. Landowners who wish to receive the 5% valuation for unimproved land provided by this law (SB17) are required to prepare a Conservation Management Plan according to rules developed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). That Plan will describe how the land will be managed to protect and maintain environmental resources. When a Conservation Stewardship Plan (CSP) is approved, the county assessor of the properties that have qualified for the special valuation will be notified and the necessary adjustment in the valuation will be made.

The Will-South Cook Soil and Water Conservation District has established a service to assist local residents with the development and submittal of their Conservation Stewardship Plan (CSP). In some cases, landowners can reduce their assessment from over 33 percent of the property's market value to 5 percent. Larger parcels, in some cases, will also be eligible for USDA cost share programs to assist with any expense associated with establishing their plan.